

Chapter 13

A Junior Warfare Officer's Perspective

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I am a junior warfare officer in the Royal Australian Navy, currently serving in my third year. Since joining, I have had the opportunity to spend six months completing basic officer training, six months posted to the Navy ship HMAS Parramatta, and currently, I am in my second year of a Bachelor of Science degree at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

In this paper, I will be discussing the work expectations of the Royal Australian Navy, and some of the challenges that I have encountered in meeting these expectations.

Navy's Expectations

The mission of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is to "fight and win in the maritime environment as an element of a joint or combined force, to assist in maintaining Australia's sovereignty and to contribute to the security of our region." As far as navies go, the RAN is relatively small, with a limited number of personnel and assets. This coupled with such a large area of land to protect makes the task of achieving the Navy's mission a challenging and arduous one. As a result, all resources must be employed to their maximum capability. Since people are the most important resource the defence organisation has, the Navy must have high expectations of its people in order to achieve the highest possible operational capability.

In order to protect Australia under such challenging conditions, personnel in the Navy must be capable of meeting certain expectations. Through many years of experience, a core set of values have been identified and deemed essential for personnel to possess in order to accomplish the expectations of the RAN.

These values are honour, honesty, integrity, loyalty, and courage. The recognition of these values plays an important role, not only in the selection of personnel, but also serving to reinforce the navy's expectations of individuals. These values will ensure that when challenges arise, personnel are capable of completing the tasks that are required of them successfully.

While the Navy suggests that these values are essential, other personal attributes are necessary to combat the challenges that an individual will face. Training cannot possibly prepare everyone for the challenges that may arise in an everyday workplace environment.

This is particularly true of the Navy where a normal working environment involves living in close confines, where a lack of regularity in daily routines is common and regular absences from a home environment frequently occur.

These factors can accentuate personal and professional issues that would not normally develop into major issues, and may even cause issues to arise that would not otherwise do so.

As a result, it is an officer's responsibility to be able to react to and solve these problems as they arise. This requires an officer to possess certain personal attributes. I feel that the most important of these attributes is to be able to have a go. By this I mean the willingness to take on responsibilities that are not necessarily your own, but contribute to the overall effective operation of the ship's company, even if this involves taking on challenges and tasks that will take you out of your comfort zone.

The RAN expects its officers to possess the ability to demonstrate leadership, work as a member of a team and act as a role model to their peers and subordinates. Often, to achieve the difficult tasks required by the Navy, members of a ship's company must be willing to do things that they would not normally do. The ability to instil this willingness into others is one of the many facets of leadership.

As a junior warfare officer, it is expected that high levels of leadership be demonstrated at all times.

This leadership must not only be demonstrated with regards to the specific job in which you are trained but also when involved in a range of other tasks.

As an officer you are a manager in charge of 20 or 30 sailors, a counsellor, a supervisor and sometimes even a friend. I feel that in order to demonstrate an effective level of leadership in all of these tasks, one must be a positive role model that provides motivation and direction to others. This is especially important in the Navy as the presence of such a strict hierarchy in a close working environment, requires officers to be the example. Any action, whether good or bad, will always be seen, and a judgment made on the outcome.

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Essentially an officer is expected to participate as an effective team member at all times, completing any task that is required in order to achieve the mission of the ship and the Royal Australian Navy.

The Challenges I Have Faced

What initially made it difficult for me to meet the expectations of the Navy was my level of unfamiliarity with the workplace environment. Coming from a small country town 650 kilometres away from the closest Navy establishment, I had relatively little exposure to the workings of a Navy ship, or even the chance to find out if I get seasick.

In order for me to function effectively in this new environment, I had to adapt quickly. Although my level of familiarity with the Navy has now increased considerably, each day presents itself with situations with which I am unfamiliar. However, now as I face these situations I am less daunted and more prepared, as my ability to adapt has been tried and tested, and as each new challenge is conquered. The unpredictability and ever-changing landscape of the Navy environment means that the ability to adapt will be an invaluable asset throughout my career.

As a female, the physical and emotional stress of life on a ship is tough. Physiologically, females tend to be more emotional and have less physical strength than the average male. However, the challenges of the Navy environment require every individual to be optimally utilised for their specific skills in order to achieve the best possible results.

Although, as mentioned, females do not have exactly the same types of skills to offer as males, it is accepted that everyone has something to offer to the operational success of the ship. As such, females are just as important to the operation of a ship as every other member of the ship's company. This culture is one that helps to create a strong camaraderie among the ship's company. For this to occur, the officers on board must make a conscious effort to ensure that each member feels a sense of belonging and usefulness whilst contributing to the operational capability of the ship.

It is important as a junior officer to be aware of the need to utilise the individual skills of sailors in the most efficient way possible. This becomes difficult at times and whilst at sea I found it very easy to get caught up in my own tasks and obligations. Long working hours with minimal, disrupted sleep added an extra dimension to the complexity of the tasks required and at times caused me to lose focus of the larger picture.

As such, it became very necessary to keep focused on all of the tasks at hand, and to also effectively spread the workload as required. Essentially, as an officer, you are expected to know the strengths and weaknesses of your sailors so that you can maximise the achievements of each individual on board, and hence, the overall effectiveness of the ship.

Another facet that I find challenging in the Navy work environment is the limited amount of opportunity to have down time in order to escape the stresses of the working environment. I have always found solitude

helpful when reflecting on situations, allowing me to obtain clarity and gain direction for the resolution of problems. This luxury is not available in such a closed community at sea. As such, it is important to be able to develop new ways to achieve the same level of relaxation and focus. Listening to music or physical exercise were some of the ways that I found helpful in achieving this. However, these options are not always available or appropriate in certain situations. Therefore, as circumstances change regularly in the Navy, it is necessary to develop individual skills to cope with workplace stresses.

Conclusion

Each person has their own challenges that they need to overcome in order to meet the expectations of their chosen career. These vary with gender, background, and culture as well as many other factors contributing to an individual's character. No matter what these challenges are, the Navy and any other workplace for that matter, requires that an individual overcomes them in such a way that they are able to perform at the level that is expected from them. The degree to which an individual overcomes their personal challenges is the degree to which they will succeed.